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ABSTRACT

Students must learn how to become leaders rather than bosses if they are going to survive and contribute to the needs of the organizations that will employ them. A course was outlined to develop classroom management practices that would simultaneously model and teach students about the philosophy and practice of empowerment. Interviews of 160 college juniors about faculty practices that made them feel powerless indicated that most of the issues they raised (straight lecture classes, no participation, seating charts) are considered time-honored instructional procedures by most faculty. The actual practices faculty might employ to empower students are limited only by creativity and contextual appropriateness. The course uses an empowerment-focused syllabus, has students react to the syllabus, lets students generate the class requirements and shape evaluation criteria, has students keep a daily log that operationalizes participation criteria, and requires a semester-long comprehensive final exam project which students work on throughout the semester. Implementing these practices has created challenging and stimulating classes. Students indicated their increased feelings of ownership, self-efficacy, and motivation. Shifting paradigms from traditional pedagogical techniques to empowerment in the classroom is imperative for preparing students to better adapt to rapid economic, political, and social changes in the 1990s and beyond. (RS)

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Teaching Organizational Communication: An Empowerment Based Approach

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Introduction

Glasser (1990) captures the essential difference between leaders and bosses in his book The Quality School with the following:

A boss drives. A leader leads.
A boss relies on authority: A leader relies on cooperation.
A boss says "I." A leader says "We."
A boss creates fear. A leader creates confidence.
A boss knows how. A leader shows how.
A boss creates resentment. A leader breeds enthusiasm.
A boss fixes blame. A leader fixes mistakes.
A boss makes work drudgery. A leader makes work interesting.

As educators, we believe that students must learn how to become leaders rather than bosses if they are going to survive and contribute to the needs of the organizations that will employ them. Thus, we have been wrestling with the question "how can we teach our students to become leaders instead of bosses?"

Unfortunately, academia has not provided us with many role models or answers. Our walks through the halls of many schools revealed that few faculty conducted their classes in a manner that motivated their students to perform high quality work or taught them how to become leaders. In fact, we observed that many faculty articulated the same attitudes, displayed the same behaviors, and created the same climates that they criticized in practicing managers as being obsolete. The implicit message being communicated by these faculty to their students was "do as I say not as I do".

A few areas in education seemed to offer hope for preparing students for the new organizational realities they will face. We tried co-operative learning, experiential learning, self-directed learning, and even read about the autotelic classroom. While these approaches appeared to steer us in the right direction we still felt that something was lacking. So we turned to our experience as organizational development consultants and the missing pieces began to fall in place.

We started by looking at our classes from a business rather than an educational frame. We generated a simple analogy. In education the faculty may be thought of as classroom managers and the students may be viewed as employees. We reasoned that we needed to structure our classes in a manner that paralleled the inspiring and progressive ideas we saw or were training people in industry to use. We decided that empowerment was the bedrock philosophical commitment that preceded any kind of effective quality

management program. So we started to develop classroom management practices that would simultaneously model and teach our students about the philosophy and practice of empowerment.

Traditional Teaching Styles At The Crossroads

In his book The Empowered Manager Block (1987) contends that when managers utilize bureaucratic control it causes their employees to maintain what they have, to be cautious, and dependent. He suggests that this type of control: a) creates it own resistance; b) denies self-expression; c) reinforces the belief that success is outside the persons control; d) promotes approval seeking; e) makes people say what they don't mean; and f) fosters the use of negative political behavior. In a nutshell, bureaucratic control causes people to feel helpless, out of control, and vulnerable. We believe that this type of control is practiced by far to often by many faculty. We believe it generates the same dysfunctions.

In his book Teaching Tips McKeachie (1986) suggests that faculty who view themselves as experts who transmit information and concepts, or authorities who set goals and procedures, create grade consciousness, dependency, and real fear of being stupid. Regrettably, the expert or authority roles are among the most frequently portrayed by faculty. When we interviewed 160 college juniors about faculty practices that made them feel powerless we found that most of the issues they raised [e.g. straight lecture classes, no participation allowed, seating charts, etc.] were considered time-honored standard operating procedures of instruction by most faculty. We have found that these practices, aside from being bureaucratic in nature, also: a) limit student involvement in the teaching-learning process; b) decrease student motivation to perform high quality work; and, c) fail to provide students with the skills they will need to become the type of leader necessary for the 21st century. We resolved not to be a part of this process and to try and change it.

Aligning Student & Faculty Goals

We define empowerment as the process of aligning student goals for the class with faculty goals for the class. This does not imply making the student want what the teacher wants. Rather, it implies adopting a set of values and enacting any litany of practices that are designed to raise students' beliefs in their sense of personal effectiveness (learning) rather than raising their hopes for favorable performance outcomes

(grades). In terms of our analogy, an empowering manager would try to create a system that allows employees to see that it is in their best interest to do quality work. Empowering faculty strive to create a learning environment that allows students to easily see the connection between achieving high quality performance goals while simultaneously satisfying their own intrinsic needs.

To achieve this objective we strive to identify and remove the factors that promote feelings of powerlessness in our students and replace them with factors that promote ownership, self-efficacy, and the intrinsic motivation to learn. We enable our students to: a) take personal responsibility for their learning; b) engage in tasks that are personally meaningful; c) feel a sense of ownership in the tasks they perform; d) feel "pulled" by the class rather than pushed by the professor or grades; e) meet their needs for power, significance, autonomy, and camaraderie; and, f) feel that their performance in class is primarily in their own hands. In essence, we have moved from enacting a bureaucratic boss role to modeling a leadership role that facilitates discovery, excitement, and personalized learning rather than standardization, memorization, and regurgitation. We encourage more faculty to follow this path.

We use five guidelines to help empower our students. [1] We openly discuss the nature, strengths, limitations, and frustrations, associated with this type of class. [2] We make quality expectations clear so that our students will know the high performance standards upon which they are evaluated. That is, before we ask them to perform a task we show them how it will be graded. [3] We continually ask our students for their feedback regarding how the class is proceeding and willingly act on their suggestions. [4] We ask our students to participate in the design and assessment of their work. That is, they help create their assignments and grade the work of themselves or their peers. [5] We call ourselves facilitators rather than professors and ask our students to think of themselves as associates. We use these criteria to help us create a supportive, collaborative, and noncoercive class atmosphere.

Specific Empowerment Techniques

Empowerment in both management and education is a philosophy as well as a practice. Philosophically, the move to empowerment is rooted in trust, in the belief that students want more from a class than a grade, and in the idea that if given a chance both students and faculty can rise to the level of responsibility required

by implementing such a paradigm. The actual practices faculty might employ to empower their students are limited only by creativity and contextual appropriateness. The key is to fashion an open, creative, team environment in which both faculty and students understand the vision [e.g., learning the content of the class in an empowering way] and are motivated to contribute to its success. We will briefly discuss some of the specific methods we have used in our classes.

Empowerment Focused Syllabus

The initial step toward empowerment requires creating a vision of greatness. This vision describes a commitment to a preferred future. The assumption is that this vision is desirable for all concerned. Creating this vision is the prerequisite act of leadership. We go to great lengths to articulate our vision by discussing our philosophy, mission, goals, beliefs about grading, and idiosyncrasies in the syllabus. Though it is longer than a normal syllabus it describes who we are, what we value, and what we are trying to achieve in an authentic manner. This allows students to know what they are getting into by taking our classes.

Student Reaction To Syllabus Papers

Near the end of the first class session we distribute the syllabus and ask our students to go home and generate responses to a series of questions about it [e.g. how do you feel about the mission?]. The goal of this assignment is to facilitate students' internalization of the principles of empowerment. This assignment sets an important precedent by soliciting student reaction to the syllabus. It guarantees that students read the vision statement (syllabus) carefully and thoughtfully. The assignment also encourages students to decide whether or not to remain in this type of class. The responses also help us gauge attitudes about the class which aids in planning future sessions.

Generating Class Requirements

As a general rule, we do not specify what tasks the students must perform in our classes. They are responsible for deciding what they will do, how it will be graded, and what percentage of their final grade the specific tasks they generate will be worth. The premise of this assignment is that students will be more committed to performing quality work on projects that they find meaningful and relevant. By creating a collaborative climate where students have the opportunity to shape the nature of their

work we assume that they will take psychological ownership of the class assignments. We have found that it is a good idea to create groups or project teams which meet separately outside of class to generate the requirements. Aside from helping the students to become acquainted with each other this process also gives them exposure to the industrial model of self-managed work teams.

Shaping The Criteria Which Measure Participation

In our classes we strive to convey the idea that empowerment means taking responsibility for your actions. We tell them that the first step in taking responsibility in this class will come by having them determine what we want when we say that this class demands high quality participation. We give them a form which outlines our desires [e.g. attendance, keeping up with and talking about the readings in class, etc.]. We then ask them to work with us in shaping the exact criteria that will be used to measure the quality of their participation. Once this form is completed they are fully aware of how class participation will be assessed. The underlying assumption of this project is that it will help our students experience the process of setting quality standards and the work it takes to achieve them.

Self-Assessment of Participation Log

Each student keeps a daily log that operationalizes the participation criteria they helped to create. This form asks the students to rate their contribution to each class session. At the end of the term these scores are averaged and serve as the students' participation grade for the semester. By doing this on a daily basis we are trying to reduce the student's dependence on us for rewards (grades) and have the student develop the ability to reward himself or herself as well as monitor individual progress in contributing to class discussions, activities, etc.

Final Exam Project

Rather than giving a typical end of the semester final exam we assign a semester long comprehensive final exam project which students work on throughout the semester. We give students a list of possible projects to complete as well as an option entitled "strike your fancy" which allows them to create their own project. The requirements for this project are as follows: a) it must show knowledge of the content areas covered in the class; b) it must show knowledge of empowerment; and, c) it must be worked on by a small

group [e.g. 4 - 6 members].

By allowing students to chose from a variety of ways to show their knowledge this project also creates conditions under which students may be more committed to producing quality work. Again, the small group arrangement simulates the use of self-managed teams in industrial organizations. We have found that format encourages a great deal of creativity, teaches students how to work together on a personally salient project, and allows them to learn more about the content of the course while at the same time experiencing a useful process.

Results

To date, we have found that implementing these practices has helped us to create challenging and stimulating classes. Through both solicited and unsolicited comments our students report that this style has definitely increased their feelings of ownership, self-efficacy, and motivation. It has also increased the value they place on learning the concepts we explore and it encourages a substantial majority of them to perform high quality work. Via a modified version of the communication climate questionnaire, our students have reported that the climate in our classes is significantly more supportive than the climate they experience in other, more bureaucratic, classes. Finally, though it was not an explicit aim of ours, we have found that it has improved our overall teacher effectiveness ratings.

Our desire to produce "leaders" led us to implementing an empowerment based pedagogy in our classes. To achieve this we had to rethink both the values and practices upon which our classes were built. Needless to say, our reflections caused us to change just about everything we used to do value and practice in class. However, we believe that the changes we made have enhanced the learning environment, helped our students better understand the content of our classes, and given them the skills they will need to become empowered and empowering leaders. Hopefully, it prepares them to be the leaders of tomorrow.

Conclusion

For many people the ideas espoused in this paper may seem radical. They may fear that students simply cannot be trusted to assume the level of responsibility this paradigm requires. These are the same concerns managers often raise regarding their employees. Nonetheless, we should remember that numerous authors

and managers have found that workers set more stringent control and quality standards when they are generated from the bottom-up, not dictated from the top-down. Furthermore, our ideas are based on the belief that if companies such as G.M., Harley, Johnsonville, Quad Graphics, McDonalds and others can trust 18-22 year old employees on the shop floor to measure their own performance, design their own systems, tinker with multi-million dollar machinery, and hire or fire staff, surely faculty can allow and promote greater levels of student involvement in the teaching-learning process.

This paper shows how the empowerment paradigm has guided us in creating classes that encourage students to make learning demands on themselves rather than being dependent on faculty. This method does not rely on coercion, the recitation of lecture notes, or dependence on extrinsic factors such as grades or threats for motivation. Rather, it relies on trust, creativity, and the desire to achieve something greater than extrinsic rewards. We believe that shifting paradigms from bureaucracy to empowerment in the classroom is imperative for preparing students to better adapt to rapid economic, political, and social changes in the nineties and beyond.

We are convinced that the foundations upon education are built need systematic and creative attention. The challenge before educators is to design and implement programs that produce leaders instead of bosses. We believe that opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of education are sufficiently evident and compelling to warrant a call to rethink the basic premises regarding content and pedagogy. Thus, we hope this paper will stimulate constructive controversy and elicit cooperation between both educators and practitioners for greater application of the concepts we present. We believe this is necessary so that our students will be better prepared to make the transition from the classroom to become leaders in the boardroom.

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